

worldview

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CRISIS AND CONTINUITY IN U. S. FOREIGN POLICY

Critics of U.S. foreign policy frequently suggest that it is the creature of a crisis mentality, capable of rushing into action whenever and wherever U.S. interests seem threatened, but unable to take the historically informed long-range view that would allow proper discrimination. Supporters of U.S. policy frequently return the compliment, saying that it is the critic who has a myopic view of reality, who fails to see how apparently unrelated actions flow from a common outlook, judgment and policy.

Simply by the accidental collocation of events that were reported on the front page, a recent issue of the *New York Times* should serve as a point of meditation for both critics and apologists. One of the events reported in the issue of March 13 was the 50th Anniversary of the collapse of Czarist rule in Russia, the end of over three centuries of Romanov monarchy, and the basis for what is now the USSR. The leader of the new government, later overthrown in the October revolution, was Alexander Kerensky who, from his present home in New York commented that he saw signs on this anniversary of increasing freedom in modern Russia. Beneath this story and a picture of Kerensky was the picture of two other leaders, former Premier Molotov and former Premier Nikita S. Krushchev, who had just cast votes for Premier Aleksei Kosygin. Near this was a story about Svetlana Alliluyeva, the daughter of Joseph Stalin, because she was "defecting" from Russia to live abroad.

On the same page began a news story about the replacement of President Sukarno of Indonesia after a 45-year public career. And, another story, the returns from the French election showed that, contrary both to general expectation and the fervent appeals of 76-year old General de Gaulle, the Gaulists suffered a strong setback.

There is no great overwhelming conclusion to draw from these accounts. We already knew that even great leaders cannot always rely on their colleagues or their constituents; that the life of a nation extends beyond that of any leader and his policies; that a strong nation will survive and adapt to

**THE NUCLEAR OBSESSION:
V. THE "STATELY MINUET"
OF THE A.B.M. DEBATE**

JACK WALKER

**MORAL CONCERNS
& ECONOMIC STRENGTH**

JACK MENDELSON

THE DARKER SIDE OF THE EARTH

VICTOR C. FERKISS

**SELECTIVE OBJECTION
& THE DRAFT**

APRIL

1967 VOL. 10 NO. 4

changing circumstances. But if we examine the varied relations that have existed between the U.S. and the USSR during the last fifty years we will be less likely to see every confrontation between two opposing powers as the possible occasion of an armageddon. All the familiar predictions about the "inevitable" clash of the U.S. and the USSR because they represent two irreconcilable positions have now become tempered by time. The realization that such predictions were born out of intense but short-range views should engender some skepticism toward those who now predict an "inevitable" clash between the U.S. and China. (It is on the basis of such foresight that one Air Force General made, allegedly, the amiable observation that now is the time for us to "nuke the chinks," i.e., drop nuclear bombs that would render China a negligible military power for an indefinite period.)

To say that history is uncertain (as it is) and

that even the best planned policies have unexpected consequences (as they do) is not to recommend either apathy or despair. It is to temper an unearned emotional intensity that wishes to see every important action of a country as strong as the U.S. as one which will determine either its destiny or its well-being. More specifically, such a meditation would temper some of the statements made by those who criticize U.S. policy in Vietnam *and* by those who support it. The situation is serious enough and the consequences both to Vietnam and the U.S. dire enough that an escalation of rhetoric is uncalled for. If, as a nation, we are to diminish as much as possible a crisis mentality either in those who form foreign policy or those who wish to act as responsible critics, there must be a large, informed body of citizens who are prepared to give that policy sustained attention even in its periods of uninteresting routine accomplishment. J. F.

in the magazines

Reinhold Niebuhr has attempted to place "Foreign Policy in a New Context" by revealing the "dogmas and illusions" which prevent a realistic assessment of the exercise of imperialistic power by the United States today, and by the USSR as well (*The New Leader*, February 27). He sees the U.S. "attempt[ing] to meet the responsibilities and hazards of our world embracing power by following the concepts Woodrow Wilson used in his futile effort to beguile an isolated nation into world responsibilities after World War I," concepts which "are bound to distort present power realities." And "that is why," Dr. Niebuhr notes, "cynical journalists in Washington speak of a 'credibility gap.' The magic of even the most ingenious politician will never transform the southern portion of Vietnam into an integral democratic nation; nor will it transform the motives of a world power concerned about its prestige into Don Quixote's desire to help the helpless."

Furthermore, "if a less ingenious and shrewd statesman than Lyndon Johnson were President, this foreign undertaking would have been abandoned. Increasing casualties and costs may yet prompt the nation and the President to sober second thoughts. Johnson's immense prestige was won by his rigorous domestic policies, by his extending the welfare state and offer-

ing the Negro minority our belated justice in equal civil rights. The cost of the war, with its attending perils of weakening the Great Society program, inflation, tight money and probably higher taxes, could erode this prestige. . . .

"If the Republicans were shrewder they would mount a viable alternative. But they are more 'patriotic' than the President in supporting the war. They foolishly suggest greater cuts in our welfare and anti-poverty programs. And they have no popular war hero to win an election by promising to end the war in Vietnam, as Eisenhower did in Korea.

"The Republicans may of course reduce the Democratic majority for the President and in Congress, sparking Congressional rebellions which Johnson's immense prestige and ingenuity have so far succeeded in suppressing. But ultimately our great democracy must find ways of extricating its peace and the security of civilization from the hazards of guiding a mature world power by ideas inherited from our Wilsonian adolescent engagement with world problems."

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The Economist looks at official explanations of the Vietnam war and finds their clarity and persuasive-